

Message from the Mayor: Back to School

Welcome to September and back to school time. I would like to take a moment to recognize the fine work of one of our employees, Tom Duclos. You all notice Tom's handy work every day in town. He is responsible for painting our crosswalks. Thanks Tom. And speaking of crosswalks, please drive carefully and remember to yield to pedestrians in the crosswalks. It is a common complaint in Westfield that motorists drive too fast and often drive through our crosswalks while a pedestrian waits to cross.

And speaking of back to school, I attended a meeting in Boston last week with the Massachusetts School Building Authority. This meeting, referred to as a scoping session, involved our architect, Margo Jones, and our Project Manager, Paul Kneedler and the MSBA technical staff. This was a productive meeting and as a result, I am in a position to propose to the city council a funding proposal. As it stands now, the school is estimated to cost \$35,931,394. The city will likely receive a reimbursement of \$23,197,382. Of course, the exact cost will be known when we receive bids in the future. The MSBA Board of Directors is scheduled to take a vote on this project, September 28th. This project, if approved on September 28th, will allow for the closure of Abner Gibbs and Franklin Avenue School. We will also be vacating the Juniper Park School at the time the new one opens. The issue of what we will do with the vacant buildings will be addressed in the future. At the appropriate time, the city will consider reuse proposals.

Now for some pulse line tidbits:

August 3, 2011, upkeep of vacant property. As many people have noticed, there are a number of foreclosures of private property and vacant business parcels. When the city is notified of such properties, we put the owner of record on notice through written communication that they need to maintain the property. Many times we are successful in this effort, but at times we are not.

August 12, 2011, why does it take so long to fill pot holes? I am pleased to say that even though we had a tough winter, due to proactive management, we were able to start repairing our roads in March. In past years, we needed to wait until our crews could access the Lane asphalt plant in April when it opens. At my direction, we procured a contract with a road repair vendor. Kudlic Brothers, our successful bidder, was able start when Palmer Paving opened their plant in March. Due to contract requirements we have with Lane, we cannot procure the needed asphalt from another vendor.

That being said, many factors go into getting a pot hole repaired. Weather is typically the number one problem. If it has rained, then we can't do it until it dries out. The second is simply the volume of repairs needed. With Kudlic's assistance, we started early in March and the city joined the fight by mid April when Lane opened their plant. Together in the next two months we tackled hundreds of potholes. With our city stat information management system we were able to track over 300 holes that needed repair. In addition to some streets that have a large number of holes. With city stat we track not only the number of holes but also the time it takes to repair them. As this was our first year tracking them, I am looking to a 5 day maximum for the repairs with a goal to hit them within 3 days of notification. I am also hopeful that soon our citizen self service, online line feature will be deployed that will allow you to place work requests through our website.

To understand what the department is up against consider this as a frame of reference, the DPW used to have over 50 employees in the 1970's, today with over 270 miles of roads, more than double from the 1970's we have fewer than 10 employees available to address pot holes on any given day. That's why I decided to add a contractor to assist our efforts. The delays were not acceptable to me. I will continue to proactively manage this issue and make adjustments as needed. I am pleased to say that even with all the weather caused disasters that diverted our efforts, our overall level of complaints have been noticeably lower than last year which would be an indicator of significant improvements in our repair effort.

August 17, 2011, paving on Noble Street and Springdale Road. Noble Street is in need of a new water main and plans are being drawn up to address that. The plan for the city is to repave the roads that feed into Main Street when the contractor is completed. We need to wait until they finish so that we get the road elevation correct. We expect final pavement to occur next spring. At this time I expect Springdale Road will be paved later this year.

August 22, 2011, street names are too similar and confusing. This situation occurs on occasion and the process to rename a street starts with our City Council and Traffic Commission. Recently we renamed a portion of Cherry Street, to alleviate confusion. This proposal was put forth by a resident and was presented to the City Council and Traffic Commission for a name change.

August 26, 2011, a caller called about the position of tree climber and a non-working foreman. We advertised for a tree climber due to the fact that the position became vacant due to a resolution in an employment matter. We have a large demand for tree service and presently one tree climber. And in fact, we did not have any qualified applicants for the job. So it will be reposted soon.

As for the nonworking foremen situation, the DPW had three of these positions for years. Recently, one of the positions became available due to an employee death. I made a decision to not fill that position. The position of the deputy superintendent is specifically required as part of the new stormwater ordinance the city council passed in 2010. There are many new burdens imposed on the city by the United States Environmental Protection Agency as a requirement of our new stormwater permit. Presently the water resources, public works and engineering departments share responsibility for the program. However, this added burden is not a specialty for these departments and as a result, it was recommended to the city that we consolidate all the duties required by EPA into the public works department and a technical expert be hired to run that department. The regulatory burdens placed on the city by the EPA and MA Department Environmental Protection are enormous today and were non existent just a few decades ago.

In January of 2011, my article to the WEN detailed the requirements of the new ordinance. If you would like a copy, please let me know. Here's a part of that article...

Section 18-157 of the city stormwater utility ordinance establishes the utility in the department of public works. Day to day supervision of field activities is under the direction of the deputy superintendent.

Section 18-158 states the purpose for the new ordinance. The end purpose is to ensure that stormwater runoff is properly managed and eliminates to the extent possible pollution from stormwater from running into our streams and rivers.

Section 18-159 establishes the city's authority to establish this utility. The city is allowed to adopt local ordinances through the powers granted to cities and towns by the state charter and subsequent Massachusetts General Laws or MGLs.

I would like to thank the Sons of Erin for hosting our city's 9/11 ceremony and for being such wonderful hosts as we honored the memory of Tara Shea Creamer, Brian Murphy and Daniel Trant. They will never be forgotten in this city.

I taped a new TV show a few weeks ago. Tune in to see Lou Sirios, owner of Ezra's Mercantile. Also featured, Dr. Suzanne Scallion our new Superintendent of Schools. My show can be seen on Channel 15, Sundays at 4PM, Wednesdays at 8PM and Thursdays at 10AM and 10PM. And you can now view all the past episodes at <http://vimeo.com/channels/201443#26073645>.

Also check out our new website <http://www.cityofwestfield.org/> and our newsletter, "Around the Whip City".

As always if you have any questions call or email me at 413.572.6201 or mayor@cityofwestfield.org.

Respectfully,

Dan Knapik, Mayor